

# ARCHAEOLOGY IN ALEXANDRIA 1961-2011: 50 YEARS OF COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Alexandria Archaeological Commission  
September 27, 2011, presentation at  
City Council Work Session

"Alexandria embodies the sweep of American history and experience in ways unmatched by cities of similar or even larger size... The City also echoes and reflects the tragedies of the nation's wars, its complex struggle with slavery, the promise of civil rights, and the daily lives of people from all walks of life in all eras of the nation's history."

*Alexandria Waterfront History Plan, 2010*

## The Importance of Alexandria



"Alexandria's history is far richer from the superior work of its archaeological program ... The City should be proud of the program's past remarkable accomplishments and committed to its future."  
*Dr. William Kelso, Director, Historic Jamestowne*

## The Importance of Archaeology for Alexandria

King Street Urban Renewal, 1960s



# Archaeology is a critical component of investigating and interpreting our history

- Complements and unifies “above ground” historical records and materials, and adds depth and richness to our understanding of history.
- Finds a voice for those whose lives and contributions may not have left another record.
- Often changes our interpretation of history, and our understanding of ourselves.

Unknown Glass Workers, Alexandria, 1911





# Archaeology's Origins in our Community, Partnership with the City and Developers.

- 1960s King Street Urban renewal and Civil War Centennial at Fort Ward shows need and interest in investigating and preserving Alexandria's past.
- Community Based Commitment – Committee of 100.



# City Commitment to Preservation and Archaeology

## Highlights:

1946: Old and Historic District, third oldest in the US.

1960s: Fort Ward, urban renewal archaeology

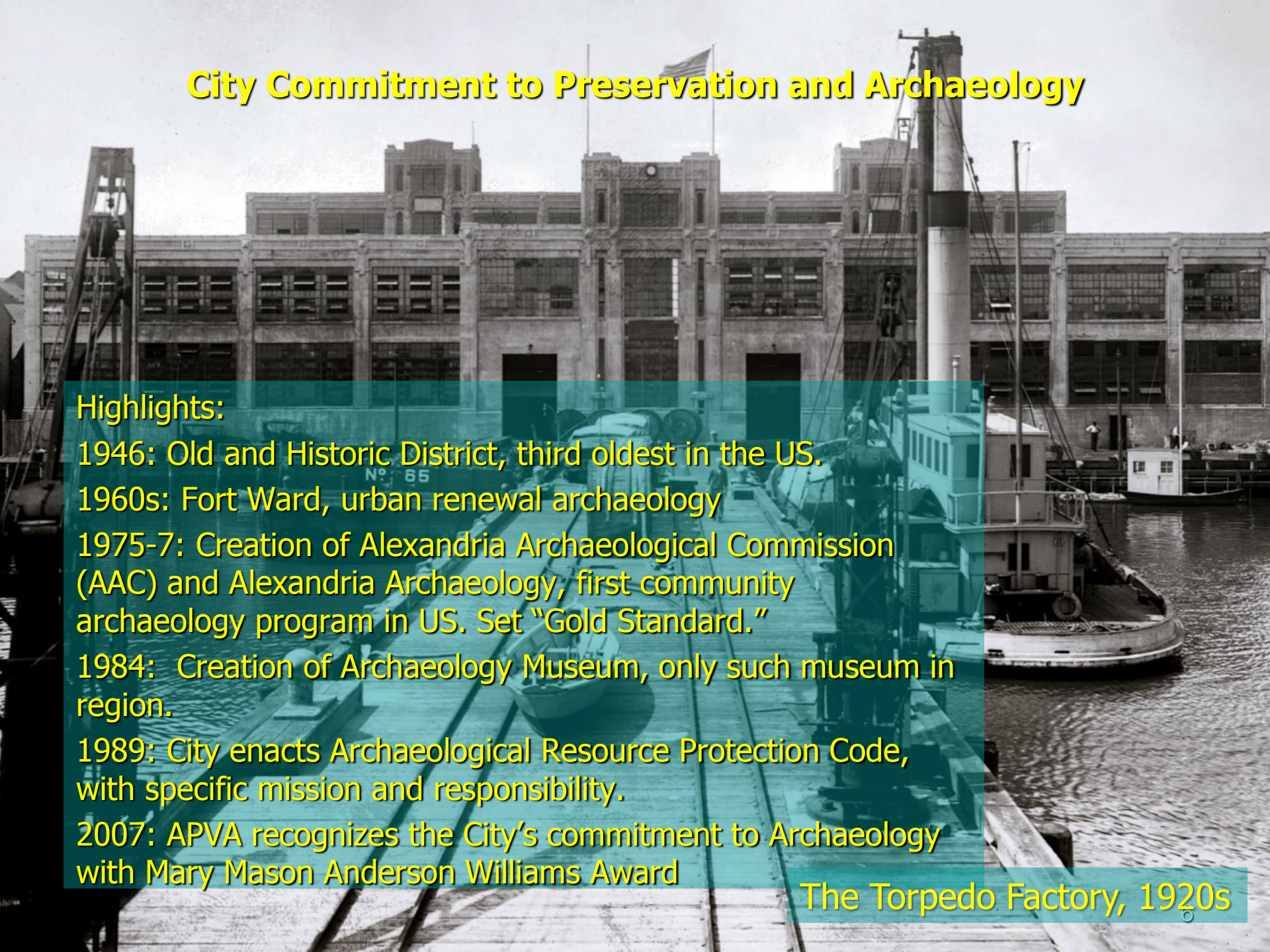
1975-7: Creation of Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC) and Alexandria Archaeology, first community archaeology program in US. Set "Gold Standard."

1984: Creation of Archaeology Museum, only such museum in region.

1989: City enacts Archaeological Resource Protection Code, with specific mission and responsibility.

2007: APVA recognizes the City's commitment to Archaeology with Mary Mason Anderson Williams Award

The Torpedo Factory, 1920s





# A Pioneering Program

A photograph of an archaeological excavation site. In the foreground, there is a large, deep pit filled with dirt and debris, including wooden planks and branches. A chain-link fence runs along the right side of the pit. In the background, a city street with parked cars and multi-story buildings is visible under a clear sky.

"Over the last 50 years, Alexandria Archaeology has developed an international reputation for its innovative public programs which have captured the imagination of the general citizenry, developers, school systems, and professional community alike. If all municipalities within the Commonwealth valued their past in the same manner as Alexandria, we would all have a clearer vision of who we are."

*Dr. Michael B. Barber, RPA, Virginia State Archaeologist*

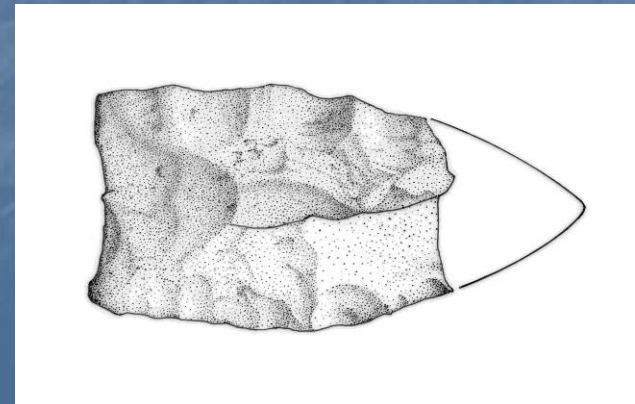
Torpedo Factory Condos, 1980s



# Community Archaeology and Diversity

Archaeology has expanded our understanding of who we are and how we got here

- Shuter's Hill
- Stonegate Preserve
- Freedmen's Cemetery





# Archaeology, Preserving our Identity

## Highlights:

- Professional research and excavation
- Interpretation
- Preservation of artifacts and materials
- Education and Oral Histories
- Site Planning and City Planning
- Geospatial Information Studies (GIS) mapping



# Partnerships



Tide Lock Park

1863



1980s



2010



*1930s*



# Archaeology and Interpretation

Examples:

- Signage
- Art
- Streetscape
- Open Space



*1990s*

Ford Motor Company Plant  
Ford's Landing



*2011*



# Discovering Archaeology: Alexandria Heritage Trail





## Education



## Archaeology and Volunteerism



## Freedmen's Cemetery



"These activities have made the program a world-class resource and have helped to attract tourists to the city from all over the world."

*Morgan D. Delaney, President, Historic Alexandria Foundation*

## Collections





# Alexandria Archaeological Commission

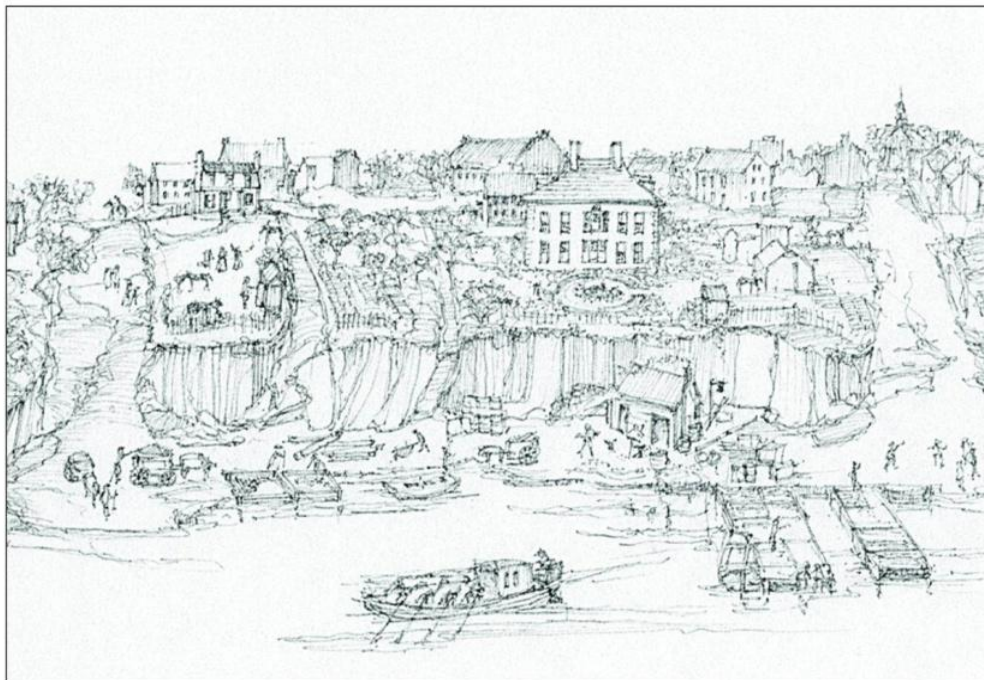
- Leadership and Stewardship
- Advice and Advocacy





# Alexandria Waterfront History Plan

## *Alexandria, a Living History*



Alexandria Waterfront with Carlyle House circa 1764

*Drawing by Elizabeth Luallen based on research conducted by*

*City of Alexandria/Office of Historic Alexandria, Archaeology staff and volunteers*

“1780-“At Alexandria...the Potomac rolls its majestic stream with sublimity and grandeur, sixty-gun ships may lie before the town, which stands upon its lofty banks, commanding, to a great extent, the flatter shore of Maryland. This town is rapidly on the increase, and ... cannot fail of becoming one of the first cities of the new world.”

The Marquis de Chastellux. Travels in North America, Vol. III, 1780–1782.

A Publication of Alexandria Archaeology  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia  
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## Stewardship and advice in action

### Waterfront History Plan:

- Unifying Stewardship
- Vision
- Community Participation
- Historians, Planners, Arts
- 1000s of Volunteer Hours
- Implementation and Funding Strategy, Public-Private



## Archaeology in Alexandria today

- FY 2011 more than 40,000 people visited the museum or attended programs, with museum open 5 ½ days a week.
- More than 1,200 students educated in museum annually.
- More than 2 million artifacts and specimens in collections - the oldest continuous collection in a US city.
- More than 225,000 documented hours donated by volunteers over 34 years – over 6,600 hours per year.
- Archaeology staff is 5 FTE – 10,360 hours a year.
- Expansive website
- Active Friends of Alexandria Archaeology





# Highlights AAC Strategic Plan 2011

Goal 1: People - Improve the staffing within Alexandria Archaeology while better using a dynamic volunteer group and promoting cooperative efforts within the Alexandria history community.

Goal 2: Museum/Lab/Education Center/Storage - Advocate for the maintenance of the current Archaeology Museum and Offices in the Torpedo Factory; Explore opportunities for the expansion of the Museum, Offices, and Storage; Advocate for Professional Study to determine space requirements, site, exhibits, and funding for new facility.

Goal 3: Resource Management - Improve funding for the Alexandria Archaeology Program from City and outside sources.

Goal 4: Archaeology, History, and Preservation - Define the future of the Alexandria Archaeology, improve preservation of historical assets, and better interpret the history of Alexandria.



# The Future

Alexandria embodies the sweep of American history and experience. It can capture and showcase the nation's maritime past, its ambitions, the tragedies of its wars, its struggle with slavery, the promise of civil rights, and the daily lives of people from all walks of life in all eras. Both as witness to this history and for its impressive, precious inventory of surviving structures, streetscapes, and fabric, Alexandria offers perhaps one of the most compelling history destinations in the United States. The opportunity to experience history sets apart the city from its neighbors in the Washington area and the mid-Atlantic region. Archaeology and interpretation of Alexandria's history should bring to life that story, and the people and places within it in the context of the American experience.